

“The Coming of the Pond Fishes”

An Account of the Introduction of Certain Spiny-Rayed Fishes, and Other Exotic Species, into the Waters of the Lower Columbia River Region and the Pacific Coast States

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“The Coming of the Pond Fishes” by Ben Hur Lampman, published in Portland in 1946, summarizes the early history of exotic fish in the northwest. The book is written with the enthusiasm of an avid angler and friend of warm-water fish. It also points out some of the controversy and concern about introducing potential predators and competitors to waters that support native species that existed even in the 1800's.

Two of the most important dates in the history of non-native fish to the western U.S. are 1869 and 1884. In 1869, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railways met at Promontory Point, Utah in the famous “Golden Spike” ceremony. The first non-native fish, shad, arrived by rail and were released in the Sacramento River in 1871, courtesy of Seth Greene, one of the earliest American fish culturists (Table 1).

The Oregon Short Line was completed in 1884, connecting the UP mainline at Granger, Wyoming to the Pacific Northwest via the Oregon-Washington Railroad and Navigation Company. By 1887, largemouth bass were established in the Snake River Drainage and other species were on the way.

Although most of the new introductions were met with much enthusiasm, there was some opposition. As early as 1893 the Oregonian carried an editorial debate on the merits of bass introductions—at least five years after the introductions had occurred. And some of the introductions by state game wardens and early fishery biologists were clearly done without sanction of their commissions or real consideration of the impacts.

Many of the very early introductions were made by private individuals, often with a profit motive. Some of the early enthusiasm for carp reads a lot like the recent publicity for ostrich and emu ranching. The only people to make any money were those that sold the brood stock and soon both the markets and natural waters were flooded.

The U. S. Fish Commission was soon involved. Livingston Stone, first deputy to Spencer Baird, the first U.S. Fish Commissioner, developed and freely utilized the “Aquarium Car”. From the 1870's through the 1920's the Fish Commission operated a salvage station on the Illinois River. As spring floods receded, salvage crews seined the oxbow lakes and sloughs for bass, catfish and sunfish. The assorted fish were loaded on the aquarium cars and shipped westward. Some of the fish were delivered to state game wardens for distribution, others were consigned to individuals or sportsman's club. Others were apparently dipped out and dumped at water stops or released where the train broke down. There must have been some sorting of fish, or the western waters would have received even more species, but the use of salvaged fish probably explains some of the unusual species and distribution that occurs today.

Introductions of non-native fishes seems to have gone through three stages. From the 1870s through the 1920s there were numerous introductions without much thought or evaluation of impacts. By the 1920s, most of the species currently managed in the West were well established. From the 20s through the 60s, the state agencies proceeded to transplant from established stocks to suitable waters--often with the unauthorized assistance of fishermen. There was a more scientific approach, especially as new reservoir habitat was created and managers attempted to match species with habitat. However, bass and panfish remained low priorities for most anglers and most fishery managers. In the 1970s tournament bass fishing and interest in warm-water fishing increased rapidly, leading to more intense management.

Table 1. Brief chronology of the coming of the pond fishes.

Common Name	Earliest introductions to western waters
Shad	1871 Sacramento River; Seth Greene and California Fish Commission 1885 Columbia, Snake and Willamette; U.S.Fish Commission (Diverted from Puget Sound, due to blocked railroad)
Striped Bass	1879 San Francisco Bay, Livingston Stone and California Fish Comm. (This introduction also included eels and lobsters)
Tench	1895 Spokane Co., Washington and Kootenai County, Idaho, USFC
Carp	1872 Sonoma County, California, private citizen, from Germany via ship and rail 1880 Troutdale, Oregon, private citizen from California 1882 USFC, California, Washington, Idaho and Oregon
Catfish	1874 White catfish, brown bullhead, San Joaquin and Sacramento; USFC 1880 Bullheads, Willamette River, private citizens 1877 Channel catfish, Sacramento, USFC 1893 Channel Catfish, Boise River, USFC (also Willamette, but not reported in Willamette and Lower Columbia until 1940's) 1943 Blue Catfish (probably flatheads) Snake River, USFWS and IDFG (There are several species including black and yellow bullheads, flathead catfish, tadpole madtom and white catfish that were introduced with no clear records, probably in mixed loads of salvaged fish.)
Largemouth Bass	1887 Boise River, private citizen 1888 Willamette River, private citizen 1892 USFC Boise, Willamette with mixed sunfish
Smallmouth Bass	1874 California, USFC 1920 Blakely Island Washington, Private timber Company 1924 Willamette River, ODFW from Blakely Island 1925 Yakima River, Benton County Game Commissioners
Crappie	1892 Boise River, USFC 1893 Willamette River, USFC mixed with other bass and sunfish. 1905 Willamette/Columbia, Releases from Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition aquaria, included both crappies, both bass, yellow perch and assorted sunfish
Sunfish	1891-1893 Various species in mixed salvage, USFC
	1874 California, USFC 1890 Loon Lake, Washington, USFC
Northern Pike	1950s Pend Orielle Lake, Idaho from Clark Fork River 1970s Couer 'd Alene Lake, Idaho, Illegal private transplants from Montana
Walleye	1950s Lake Roosevelt, USFWS or possibly private citizen 1975 Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir, IDFG

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